

**Focusing our efforts  
to better fulfill our mission**



**Vermont State Rehabilitation Council**  
Annual Report 2008–2009

# State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

*Joelle Brouner, Executive Director of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council; used by permission.*

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation program. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability-rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short-lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks. As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, endorsed the regulations. The Rehabilitation Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation Program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment. During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.

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## The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it “shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit under its title, particularly responsibilities relating to...eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals...”

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business.

**This Annual Report of the State Rehabilitation Council is dedicated to two former members of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council, in recognition of their contributions to the improvement of VR services to Vermonters with disabilities.**

## Dedication

### A Tribute to Kim Towle

*Hugh Bradshaw*

It is with great sadness we note the recent passing of a good friend and longtime advocate, Kim Towle. I had the pleasure of working with Kim both during my tenure as the Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council and in my capacity as a member of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation leadership team. I remember fondly Kim's visit with us to Washington, D.C., several years ago where she made an impassioned plea to our congressional delegation to find ways to better serve youth in transition here in Vermont and on the national level.

In addition to her tireless advocacy on behalf of young Vermonters, Kim also provided incredible leadership as a business person working to increase employment opportunities for all workers with disabilities. When she spoke on the business case for recruiting people with disabilities, her warmth, honesty and practical examples were both inspiring and motivating. Kim understood the importance of including



photo: Hugh Bradshaw

*Kim Towle (1956–2009) with Senator Jim Jeffords in his Washington office, Spring 2005*

people with disabilities in every facet of the community, and she brought passion and energy to her message wherever she went.

Kim will be sorely missed, but her legacy will continue. As a result of her leadership and determination, Vermont is now on the forefront of services to young adults with disabilities, and for that we are eternally grateful.



## A Tribute to Peter Grassadonia

*Sam Liss*

Peter and I entered the Board of Directors of the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) at the same time—on or around March 2000. Upon first meeting Peter, I thought he didn't like me—he appeared gruff, grumpy and unwelcoming. Indeed, he seemed the quintessential description of a photo of him taken many years earlier—the “Sicilian Enforcer.”

Soon, though, this foreboding image of the man would give way to the Peter Grassadonia that I grew to respect and consider a paternal mentor, and whose company I would come to enjoy.

Peter, beneath his forbidding and obstinate facade, had the proverbial “heart of gold.” He was ALWAYS concerned about those suffering the throes of social injustice—whether they be persons with disabilities or those working persons barely able to make ends meet. If need be (and that was quite often), Peter would play “devil's advocate,” even at the expense of exasperating his colleagues.

Peter was a devoted, if strong-willed, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor in Vermont—at all times placing the best interests of his clients at the forefront. He also steadfastly sought to improve the employment climate for persons with disabilities as a member of the Governor's Committee on Employment for “the Handicapped” (the old term).

He was among the first in Vermont to understand that if physical access to employment was limited, all the best intentions could not be realized. Just ask Governor Douglas: Peter asked Jim Douglas many years ago to use a wheelchair to navigate the streets of Montpelier to comprehend such barriers. Jim agreed and I believe we are all the better for that.

*Peter Grassadonia  
(1936–2008)*

Several Vermont Governors appointed Peter to positions on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) knowing his dedication to the cause of human rights as it applies to persons with disabilities and his penchant for getting things done.

The State Rehabilitation Council and the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, in concert with many other entities and individuals, would like to extend their gratitude to all Peter accomplished to improve the lives of persons with disabilities and the lives of all those struggling to live, to work and to realize at least a small part of the “American Dream.”

Peter will be missed, but I promise all of you that every one of us who breathes the air of Vermont—presently disabled or not—have Peter, along with others, to thank for the very tangible improvements to their lives that now exist. That is Peter's legacy!



## From the Co-Chairs of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

2009 was a year of change for the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). On the basis of an excellent retreat held on a snowy day in December, 2008—attended by nine SRC members in spite of the winter weather watch that was in effect—the Council restructured itself, forming new committees focused squarely on the SRC's key functions as mandated in the Rehab Act. Two committees were retained—Steering and Policy & Procedures—and two new committees—Performance Review and Advocacy, Outreach & Education—were formed.

As the reader can see by the summary committee reports in this Annual Report, the new committees have organized themselves and accomplished much during their first year. They have laid the groundwork for even greater accomplishment in coming years.

The Steering Committee continues to function as the hub of the Council between meetings, helping to plan the programs of the Council and to make key decisions between full Council meetings. We hope to continue to learn from other Councils about how SRCs can operate most effectively. We also hope to coordinate more closely with the other SRC in Vermont, the one that advises the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI).

Membership in the SRC, after lagging in previous years, is now almost up to full strength. New members have

brought new energy, expertise and effectiveness to the Council.

We are proud that Vermont's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) continues to lead the nation in excellence of service delivery. To cite but one indicator: A recent study shows that Vermont's rate of engagement with the population it serves (as defined by total closures measured against the population of people with disabilities) is more than three times the national average!

One of us, Harriet Hall, has completed her second term as co-chair and her second full term on the Council, and accordingly has retired from the Council. Harriet has helped to guide the SRC through a period of change and growth. The other co-chair, Michele Hubert, was re-elected in December to a new term. Also elected as co-chair was Neal Meier, an enthusiastic and energetic member of the Council; we welcome Neal to his new leadership role.

It is our hope that the Vermont SRC will continue to grow and prosper during 2010 and will contribute significantly to the continued improvement of VR services in Vermont.

*Harriet G. Hall*

Harriet Hall, SRC Co-Chair

*Michele Hubert*

Michele Hubert, SRC Co-Chair



## From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



photo: P. Neal Meier

VocRehab Vermont has completed another successful year helping Vermonters with disabilities to work in their local communities. For the first time in 19 years we did not assist more people than the year before to go to work; however, in the worst economy since the Great Depression, we reached 97% of the employment outcomes for the prior year. This achievement reflects the “do whatever it takes” approach of every staff member in the division.

In the last two years, VocRehab Vermont has been centered on serving both of our primary customers—the job seeker with a disability and the employer. Our new Employment Services Manager is the “voice” of the employer at every table. We have expanded our partnership with VABIR (Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation) and hired additional Employment Consultants to serve the business community. “Jobsville” meetings have sprung up in every office where VR counselors and employment staff come together to understand who needs a job and where the jobs are. We completed a comprehensive employer satisfaction survey that is informing our work. As a result, we recently created VR Business Account Managers who are building relationships with as many businesses in our communities as possible. Employers are calling us with job openings. Through our mini-revolution, all staff understand now that “everyone is a job developer.”

In the last year, we began a rebranding effort: *Creative Workforce Solutions—An Initiative of VocRehab Vermont*. New marketing materials were created and shared across the state, and a media campaign launched in radio and print. In May, we received \$1.6 million in ARRA stimulus funds, which we targeted to using directly to support jobseekers and employers. Our focus on progressive employment—meeting the jobseeker and the employer in their comfort zone while engaging in real work activities—is showing great promise. Jobseekers with multiple barriers are succeeding in the workplace.

Recently, our umbrella agency asked us to coordinate employment programs across four departments and seven divisions to create a single interface with the Vermont business community through *Creative Workforce Solutions*. We are engaged in a massive effort across the agency to make this happen. I believe this exciting work will result in many more disadvantaged and disabled Vermonters achieving greater independence while overcoming a predicted labor shortage in future years.

As we embark on new enterprises that will stretch us in so many ways, we appreciate the SRC’s advocacy on our behalf and commitment to our mission and customers. We applaud the SRC’s hard work in 2009 to restructure and refocus its efforts. This can only help VR and the Vermonters and employers we serve.

# The Year in Review — Summary SRC Committee Reports



photo: Jim Rader

## Policy and Procedures Committee

*Don Parrish, Chair*

The Policy and Procedures Committee works on a three-year cycle in order to accomplish its defined tasks. This committee is responsible for reviewing the entire VocRehab Policy and Procedures manual, including the spending guidelines, and suggesting changes that reflect best practices and are in compliance with the federal regulations. It is also our task to review the SRC By-Laws regularly to ensure that the Council is conducting itself in a manner consistent with them.

**In the past three years committee members, in collaboration with VocRehab, have participated in workgroups to revise the chapters on:**

- Transition;
- Drug and Alcohol Use; and
- Transportation.

The committee also helped to revise the standard closure letter used by VocRehab counselors.

In the past year the committee finished the last chapters in the three-year review of the Manual. This included a review of the spending guidelines, which started with a survey of all VR counselors to ascertain, based on their field experience, which guidelines needed to be revised. With this feedback from VR staff, appropriate changes were made to reflect the actual costs of services to clients. All the proposed changes to the Manual were presented to the full Council and hearings were held to get input from the public.

Most of the substantive revisions to the Transportation chapter focused on van purchases, including a provision for mandatory driver evaluations for all drivers receiving vans. The primary purpose of these evaluations is to determine the appropriateness and safety of the van for the particular driver. Van spending guidelines were revised to be more equitable for all purchasers, and a new position of Van Modification Specialist Counselor was created so that someone with essential knowledge of the process will be involved in all van purchases.

The Ticket-to-Work chapter was also completely revised, as a guidance-only chapter, to reflect the Social Security Administration's changes to the federal regulations. The By-Laws review will be a priority for the coming year. Members of this committee will also participate in a workgroup to revise the chapter on Supported Employment in the upcoming year. There have been issues in the past with some of the designated agencies and issues about the level of involvement by VocRehab; these will be addressed by the committee.

Overall, the committee has worked hard to accomplish the tasks set before them. We look forward to our work in the new year, including the start of a new review of all chapters of the Policy and Procedures Manual.



## Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee

*Sam Liss, Chair*

Pursuant to the restructuring of the Vermont SRC, the Council's Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee began its first year of operation in February 2009. The committee's functions are three-fold:

- **Advocacy** on issues related to VR's core function—finding and maintaining employment for persons with disabilities;
- **Outreach** to governmental and private entities to familiarize them with the functions and services of VR and the SRC, and to seek collaboration on areas of common interest; and
- **Education** of legislators, potential partner organizations, secondary school educators and others regarding the functions of VR and the SRC.

Since outreach and education functions and goals are closely related, these are considered together below.

### Advocacy

The committee has tackled several issues in preparation for advocating for positive change on the State and Federal levels:

- SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) 1 for 2 benefit offset demonstration project;
- MWPD (Medicaid for Working Persons with Disabilities);
- Rehab Act reauthorization;
- RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration)/OSERS (Office of

Special Education and Rehabilitation) nominations and appointments by the new Administration; and

- WIPA (Work Incentive Planning and Assistance) project reauthorization.

These initiatives have led to deeper involvement in a range of pertinent State and national issues; for example:

- Adequate health care for persons with disabilities in any legislative health care reform package; and
- Elimination of income and asset “cliffs” in a wide range of entitlement programs to better and more efficiently meet the needs of consumers.

### Outreach and Education

The committee is exploring various possibilities for SRC presentation

- Legislative breakfasts;
- State and regional workforce enhancement groups; and
- State and regional economic development and planning units.

Our goal is to educate these groups on VR's functions and goals and identify areas of mutual interest for constructive collaboration. We will also promote VR's dual consumer approach—working both with persons with disabilities and with employers for mutual satisfaction.

The committee is dedicated to following through on its early initiatives in a manner that best serves VR's consumers. We look forward to building upon our work in 2009 and to meeting future challenges.



photo: Meg Pond

## Performance Review Committee

*Christine McCarthy, Chair*

The Performance Review Committee (which first met in February 2009) monitors and analyzes how well the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is serving its customers. The committee:

- Gives input to the full SRC regarding the development of measures of performance (including the Needs Assessment survey and Customer Satisfaction and Employer Satisfaction surveys);
- Reviews available statistical data and measures of performance; and
- Makes recommendations to the full SRC regarding the content of the State Plan.

### Achievements in 2009

#### Identifying sources of relevant data.

The work of the committee began with an overview of various VR data resources. These include:

- Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Employer Survey (first done in 2009)
- Employee Satisfaction Survey
- Baldrige Survey
- Partner Survey (may be done in 2010)
- Needs Assessment

#### Creating a work plan and schedule for the committee.

The committee's work plan for the year called for reviewing the following data sources:

- **April 2009**  
Consumer Survey, Goals & Priorities
- **June 2009**  
Baldrige Survey, Definition of Needs Assessment
- **October 2009**  
Employer Satisfaction Survey
- **December 2009**  
Standards and Indicators, Employee Satisfaction Survey
- **February 2010**  
State Plan Goals and Priorities

#### Digging deeper into the data in order to make informed recommendations to the full Council.

##### Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Overall, VR clients have a high level of satisfaction with the agency, with a steady upward trend since 2003. The level of satisfaction was consistent across the state. The percentage of clients reporting problems has been steadily declining, and the percentage reporting that the Division did work to resolve any problems has increased. Most client issues, concerns or problems focus on the need for additional support, difficulties in finding employment, communication and the desire for more information. Suggestions to address these concerns are clear expectations for consumers, follow-through, setting expectations early on about time-frame, phone/email communication, and understanding of local job opportunities.

### Baldrige Survey

This survey looks at who the agency is, how it is performing in seven areas, and what should be its priorities. VR scored highest in senior leadership and communication. The top areas of concern identified by staff surveyed—Communication and Organization Performance, Management of Information Technology, Workforce Enrichment, and Emergency Readiness—became part of VR's strategic plan.

### Needs Assessment

In the past the assessment has been approached through focus groups. Dissatisfied with the results of past assessments, the committee will explore the option of using all the data collected through other sources as a basis to determine needs.

### Employer Survey

This was the first time VR has surveyed employers in Vermont, exploring how well the agency is known and how employers view its work. This survey will serve as a baseline as VR develops its dual customer approach of serving both clients and employers. Overall, employers who work with VR know and like the services, but VR and VABIR (Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation) are not generally well known. The survey shows tremendous opportunity to market, to meet businesses where they are and to get the message out.

### Focusing on whether VR has achieved its goals and priorities as given in the State Plan.

In reviewing the plan particular discussion focused on:

#### RSA Performance Indicators:

- Indicator 1.5—VR wages compared to state average
- Indicator 1.6—Percentage of VR customers achieving self-support
- Indicator 1.2—Percentage of VR customers achieving employment outcome

#### VR Strategic Plan Goals:

- Goal 4—Increase employer use of VR services
- Goal 5—Increase VR employee satisfaction
- Goal 7—Increase capacity to serve unserved/underserved populations
- Goal 10 — Improve outcomes of community providers serving individuals with severe mental illness

### Helping develop questions for the Needs Assessment and Consumer Satisfaction Survey.

### Reviewing State legislation and the budget outlook.

### Linking to the VR I-Team (Implementation Team) and the VR strategic planning process.

#### Issues identified included:

- Clear communication of process and expectations from the beginning;
- Working with consumers who have a high level of skills; and
- Serving consumers with IQs between 70 and 80.

photo: Don Parrish



*In photo at right: Council, staff and guests at Union Institute and University, December 2009. Left to right: P. Neal Meier, James Smith (staff), Karen Hussey, Jennifer Whitmore, Martha Frank, Jim Rader (staff), Michele Hubert, William Pendlebury, Don Parrish, David Townsend, Ellie Marshall (guest), Diane Dalmasse, John Spinney, Sam Liss, John Alexander, and Whitney Nichols (guest). Not pictured: Patricia Araujo, Harriet Hall, and Christine McCarthy.*

photo: Meg Pond



## Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members, 2009

### Steering Committee

**Harriet Hall**, Newport, Co-Chair (AO&E; P&P)

**Michele Hubert**, Brownington, Co-Chair (AO&E; P&P; PR)

**Diane Dalmasse**, Stowe, Director, DVR (AO&E)

**Sam Liss**, Sunderland, (AO&E (chair); P&P; PR)

**Christine McCarthy**, Williston (PR (chair))

**Don Parrish**, Shrewsbury (AO&E; P&P (chair); PR)

**James Smith**, South Burlington, Budget & Policy Manager, DVR (DVR liaison to the SRC)

### Other Council Members

**John Alexander**, West Burke (AO&E; P&P; PR)

**Patricia Araujo**, Burlington (P&P)

**Martha Frank**, Burlington (AO&E; P&P)

**Karen Hussey**, South Hero (P&P)

**P. Neal Meier**, Ph.D. Georgia (PR)

**William Pendlebury**, Brattleboro (P&P; PR)

**John Spinney**, Waterbury (P&P)

**David Townsend**, Rutland (PR)

**Jennifer Whitmore**, Brownington (AO&E; P&P; PR)

### Support Staff

**Jim Rader**, Coordinator

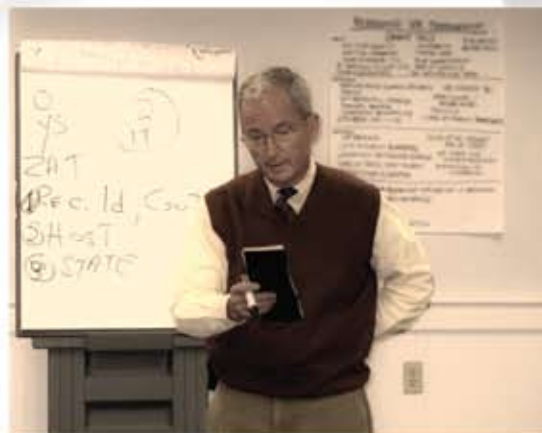
*AO&E = Advocacy, Outreach & Education Committee*

*P&P = Policy & Procedures Committee*

*PR = Performance Review Committee*



## The SRC at Work— a Photo Montage





# VR's Contribution to Vermonters with Disabilities and Their Communities

## Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

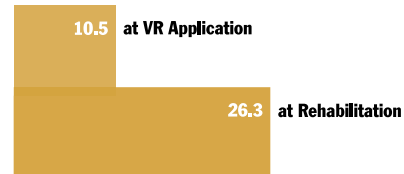
VocRehab Vermont's core mission is to realize human potential by putting meaningful work within reach of Vermonters with significant disabilities.

We help VR consumers figure out what work will work for them through careful assessment, counseling and guidance from our expert staff.

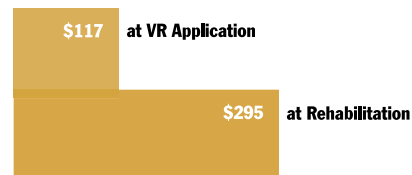
We capitalize on our extensive networks in the employer community to create job opportunities and make good placements that match employer needs with jobseeker skills, and help employers retain staff with disabilities.

We use our financial resources within Vermont communities to support our consumers as they transition to stable employment, and our employers as they try out new workers.

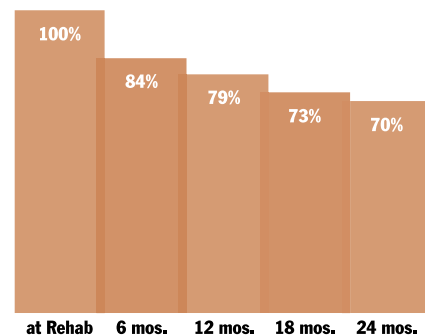
### Change in Average Hours Worked per Week



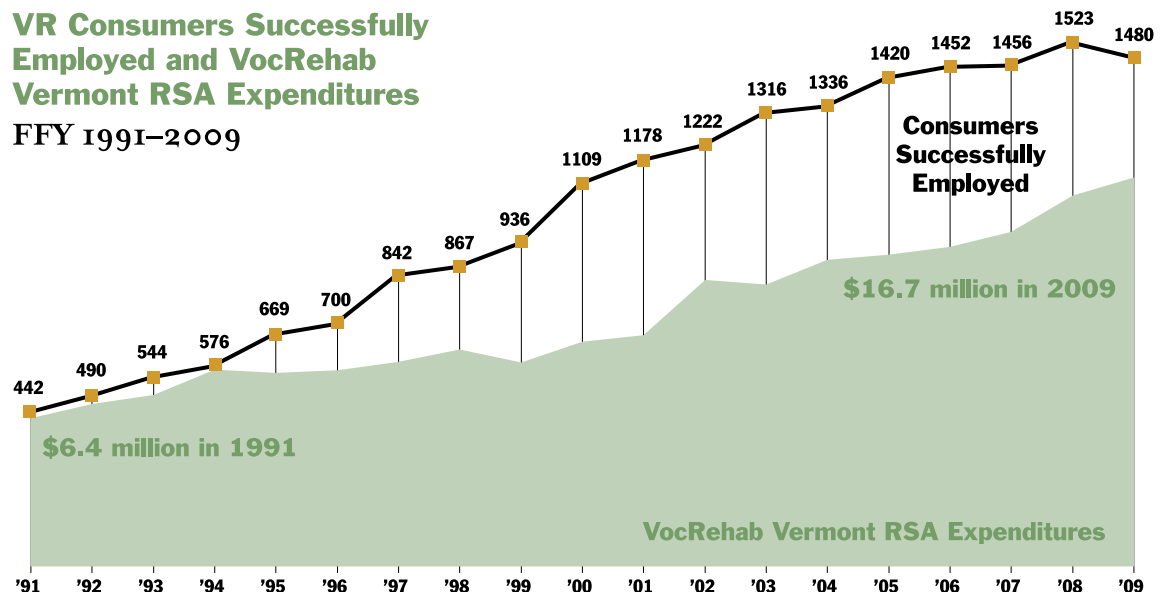
### Change in Average Weekly Earnings



### Job Retention Rate



### VR Consumers Successfully Employed and VocRehab Vermont RSA Expenditures FFY 1991-2009



## Resources for Growth, for our Future

VocRehab Vermont is funded primarily by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Education. About 80% of our funding is federal money which goes into the local economies of Vermont towns—to local stores to purchase work tools and clothing; to health care providers and medical equipment suppliers; to community colleges and technical training programs; to transportation providers; and to Vermonters in community agencies who provide support services for workers with disabilities.

### Vermont's rankings

RSA ranks public VR agencies on their performance each year. Our record:

*New VR applicants per million state population*—we're doing a great job of reaching out to as many Vermonters as possible.

**in New England: 1; in the nation: 1**

*VR employment outcomes per million state population*—we're effective in getting Vermonters in for VR services and on to successful employment.

**in New England: 1; in the nation: 1**

*Average expenditure per employment outcome*—we get results without spending more than we need to, leaving resources for others.

**in New England: 1; in the nation: 3**

*Ticket participation rate*—we help many SSA beneficiaries return to work and actively claim reimbursement from SSA for these services. As a result, we bring more federal money into the State to serve Vermonters with disabilities.

**in New England: 1; in the nation: 1**

## Stimulating Vermont's Economy

VocRehab was given \$1.6 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in May 2009. We focused on quickly getting ARRA funds out into communities where it could do the most good to stimulate employment. The funds allowed us to expand access to services for consumers and employers to help retain jobs and create new opportunities—exactly what the money was intended to do. We're focusing our ARRA spending towards:

- **Alternative Placements** that include such things as work trials, internships, on-the-job training, temp-to-hire placements and other options to get people working and allow consumers to gain experience with reduced risk to employers;
- **Short-Term Training** to support programs leading to jobs such as Licensed Nursing Assistants or Commercial Drivers; and
- **Workplace Supports** to help workers adapt to new jobs by providing things like clothes, transportation, tools, assistive technology and interpreters.

So far, 47 consumers have closed their VR case successfully with employment after participating in an ARRA-funded Alternative Placement. For these 47:

- 29 were hired permanently by the employer with whom they were placed.
- \$30,620 was paid out in ARRA funds.
- \$121,500 in earnings resulted for a 3 month period (that's \$486,000 annually).



The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We seek new members who have a wide range of interests and talents to contribute to help improve the services of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to the citizens of Vermont with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Jim Rader, Coordinator.

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